

# Slovakia in the transatlantic context

---

Findings of the survey  
*Transatlantic Trends 2004*  
with a special focus on Slovakia

The survey Transatlantic Trends is a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Compagnia di San Paolo, with additional support from the Luso-American Foundation, Fundacion BBVA, and the Institute for Public Affairs (IVO).

The Slovak leg of the survey was made possible thanks to financial support from the Central European Foundation, U. S. Steel Košice, Hewlett-Packard Slovakia and the Západoslovenská energetika Fund of the Pontis Foundation.

The Institute for Public Affairs would like to thank all these institutions for acknowledging the importance and uniqueness of the Transatlantic Trends project and were willing to support it financially.

Powered by



**U. S. Steel Košice, s.r.o.**  
A Subsidiary of United States Steel



i n v e n t



in co-operation with



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION .....	5
II. KEY FINDINGS .....	6
III. ARE THE SLOVAK PUBLIC'S ATTITUDES TO FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES IMPORTANT? .....	7
IV. WHAT KIND OF SLOVAKIA ON THE INTERNATIONAL CHESSBOARD? .....	8
V. TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIPS: THE UNITED STATES AND/OR EUROPE? .....	9
VI. PERCEPTION OF INTERNATIONAL THREATS .....	11
VII. USE OF MILITARY FORCE .....	12
VIII. STRONG ETHOS OF ALLIANCE .....	13
IX. SLOVAKIA AS A NEW MEMBER OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC ALLIANCE .....	14
X. IRAQ .....	15
XI. FOREIGN POLICY PURSUED BY THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION AND RELATIONS TO THE UNITED STATES .....	15
XII. TURKEY .....	16
XIII. DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES WITHIN SLOVAK SOCIETY .....	17
XIV. CONCLUSION .....	17

#### **Information on the survey:**

The survey *Transatlantic Trends 2004* is a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Compagnia di San Paolo, with additional support from the Luso-American Foundation, Fundacion BBVA, and the Institute for Public Affairs (IVO). Collection of data and field co-ordination was conducted by the EOS Gallup Europe agency network; in Slovakia, it was Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS) Slovakia.

The interviews were conducted between June 6 and June 24, 2004. In all countries, a random sample of approximately 1,000 men and women, 18 years of age and older, were interviewed. In Slovakia (as well as in Poland and Turkey), the survey was implemented through face-to-face interviews, while in other countries it was using CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews).

The report operates with certain summary data:

- Europe (EU) 9 – results for Europe, which comprise data from France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Slovakia.
- Europe (EU) 7 – in order to be able to compare the latest findings with those from 2003, we use a specific category of “EU 7” that includes France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Portugal, i.e. those European countries that were surveyed also in 2003.

Europe-wide figures are weighted on the basis of the size of the adult population in each of the countries surveyed.

***Slovakia in the transatlantic context* forms a supplement to the general report from the survey *Transatlantic Trends 2004* that had been elaborated by the international team under the GMF leadership. In order to paint a complete picture of data from Slovakia, we have included also data produced by other surveys, especially those conducted by the Institute for Public Affairs, as well as the series of surveys examining attitudes of the Slovak public to NATO conducted by the National Education Centre – Institute for Researching Culture and Public Opinion (NOC ÚVKVM) between 2001 and 2003.**

# I. INTRODUCTION

The transatlantic project was conceived in 2002. Less than a year after the most tragic terrorism assault on the territory of the United States, two American institutions (the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations) conducted a breakthrough survey called *Worldviews 2002*\*. Its main objective was to compare the views of Americans and Europeans (particularly inhabitants of Great Britain, France, Germany, Poland, Italy and the Netherlands) of the issues of security, transatlantic partnership, securing global stability, etc. Back then, of course, the survey's authors could not possibly anticipate that the largest "transatlantic turbulence" was merely yet to come and that the Iraqi crisis would divide the European and American publics in a much more dramatic way than the events of September 11.

The survey was repeatedly conducted in 2003 and again it uniquely documented the recent shifts in people's opinions, not only on the America vs. Europe axis but also within the "old" continent itself. The list of six European countries originally examined in 2002 was enlarged to include Portugal. Despite the inclusion, though, the portrait of Europe was still far from complete, especially due to inadequate representation of Central and Eastern European countries that continued to be represented only by the largest (and simultaneously the most "pro-American") Poland.

Nevertheless, the survey again met with a positive response worldwide and in 2004 it was conducted again, including further three countries: **Spain** – a country that only recently experienced the horrors of a terrorism assault by Al-Qaida, which spurred a change in the government and forced it to withdraw its contingent from Iraq; **Turkey** – a country that is both geographically and culturally located on the "boundary", as it is a long-term

NATO member but its application to join the EU has been repeatedly turned down; and finally **Slovakia** – the smallest (and youngest) of all countries participating in the survey and a country that recently joined NATO and the European Union (EU) and currently it is trying to find its place in the enlarged Euro-Atlantic community.

While in previous years it was rather difficult to place opinions of the Slovaks into the larger mosaic since we had to use data from other surveys exploring similar issues, this year the common comparative framework has enabled us to see the Slovak society more clearly in the international context.

The survey focuses on various issues of international politics and security such as global threats, use of military force, legitimacy of international institutions, transatlantic relations, etc., that is, complex foreign policy issues on the highest level. Generally speaking, the survey provided a rich empirical material that will take some time before it is properly analyzed.

The following analysis focuses only on findings from Slovakia, which are naturally compared to the broader context of findings from other countries. In this sense, ***Slovakia in the transatlantic context forms a supplement to the general report from the survey Transatlantic Trends 2004*** that had been elaborated by the international team under the GMF leadership. In order to paint a complete picture of data from Slovakia, we have included also data produced by other surveys, especially those conducted by the Institute for Public Affairs, as well as the series of surveys examining attitudes of the Slovak public to NATO conducted by the National Education Centre – Institute for Researching Culture and Public Opinion (NOC ÚVKVM) between 2001 and 2003.

---

\* Similar issues of global importance are regularly examined by another international comparative survey conducted annually by Pew Research Center from the United States.

## II. KEY FINDINGS

- The survey *Transatlantic Trends 2004* examined the public opinion in the United States and Europe one year after launching military operations in Iraq that highlighted and deepened the “transatlantic gap”. The results of the survey indicate that one year since the beginning of the Iraqi conflict and in spite of all that has been said and done, many Europeans still wish to remain on friendly terms with the United States; at the same time, though, they wish to play a more independent and self-reliant role in global developments.
- The opinions of Slovak citizens who were included in the survey for the first time formed part of the colourful palette of other European countries’ public opinion. In some issues, the Slovaks did not differ much from the European public opinion mainstream, while in others they departed that mainstream. The backgrounds of these specifics seem to have different but easily “traceable” and explainable roots.
- As far as their attitude to future transatlantic co-operation goes, the Slovaks fit smoothly into the greater European picture: while most Slovak citizens believe that the United States and the European Union do have enough common values to be able to co-operate in the future, they also maintain that the EU standpoint should be more independent from that of the USA. The European public is generally reserved about the U.S. leadership role and expressed critical views about the war in Iraq. In these particular key issues, Slovakia seems to be closer to those European countries that are more critical on these issues.
- The Slovak public values the ethos of alliance and subscribes to the principle of multilateralism. However, the Slovaks are below the European average when it comes to acknowledging the necessity of NATO for their country’s security; also, they are somewhat less ready to endorse the country’s military involvement in defending its ally.
- One of Slovakia’s most perceptible dissimilarities is a comparatively higher proportion of inhabitants who prefer their country keeping itself aloof from international affairs and taking a somewhat isolated standpoint in respect to the outside world. Compared to the average European, the average Slovak more emphatically refuses the model of “a single world superpower”. Most Slovaks believe that “no country should be a superpower”. Also, Slovak citizens seem to be less sensitive to certain global threats and less likely to endorse the use of military force.
- Until the last year’s survey, new NATO members were represented only by Poland, which is a specific case due to its size but especially its traditionally strong pro-Atlantic orientation. Although the Polish support to the United States’ foreign policy has declined significantly compared to 2003, Poland remains a strong advocate of a pro-Atlantic Europe. The public opinion in Poland and Slovakia was similarly supportive of the respective country’s NATO membership. But although this survey did not produce any direct empirical evidence, other surveys justify the conclusion that in respect to other transatlantic issues, Slovakia seems to stand on the position of defending the interests of smaller Central and Eastern European countries as well as “novices” in the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance.

### III. ARE THE SLOVAK PUBLIC'S ATTITUDES TO FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES IMPORTANT?

In joining the EU and NATO, Slovakia has successfully completed an important stage in its modern history. But for Slovakia, this step does not mean “the end of history”; quite the contrary, the upcoming stage is likely to be equally important but much more complex and demanding of the extent and depth of internal resources of the country’s foreign policy. The variety of goals, issues, questions and challenges is likely to increase and not decline. Such a hypothesis can be corroborated by at least two facts: first, the very accession to mentioned international institutions, which makes Slovakia part of a larger entity, its active player, partner and opponent; second, the generally very dynamic international situation whose most typical features include emergence of new threats and continuing search for a new world order.

Slovakia is a small Central European country, which has in its modern history experienced a number of regimes, state formations and an abundance of historical discontinuity. Furthermore, its historical memory remembers too well that its fate has been too often decided outside its borders. Together with the feelings of smallness and unimportance, this historical heritage is at the root of people’s generally weaker interest in world developments and foreign policy whose understanding requires a certain level of awareness and experience.

The key decision-makers in the field of foreign policy are certainly members of the elite and various institutions; however, an increasingly important role is played by civil society associations that represent the public in the broadest sense of the word. Here, the country also has to catch up with deficits stemming from the lack of experience and information, as well as the inadequate contextual perception of international political context

or the underdeveloped public debate on international issues. The country’s long-term position on the waiting list and its endeavour to close the gap behind its neighbours is only gradually evolving into a “full-fledged membership identity”. Therefore, it is very important to know how people perceive chief foreign policy issues and context.

When reading and interpreting the survey *Transatlantic Trends 2004*, one must realize that it compared Slovakia to countries that have a long tradition of playing an active role in international politics; most of them are established democracies with functioning market economy where foreign policy issues are strongly present in public debates on domestic issues.

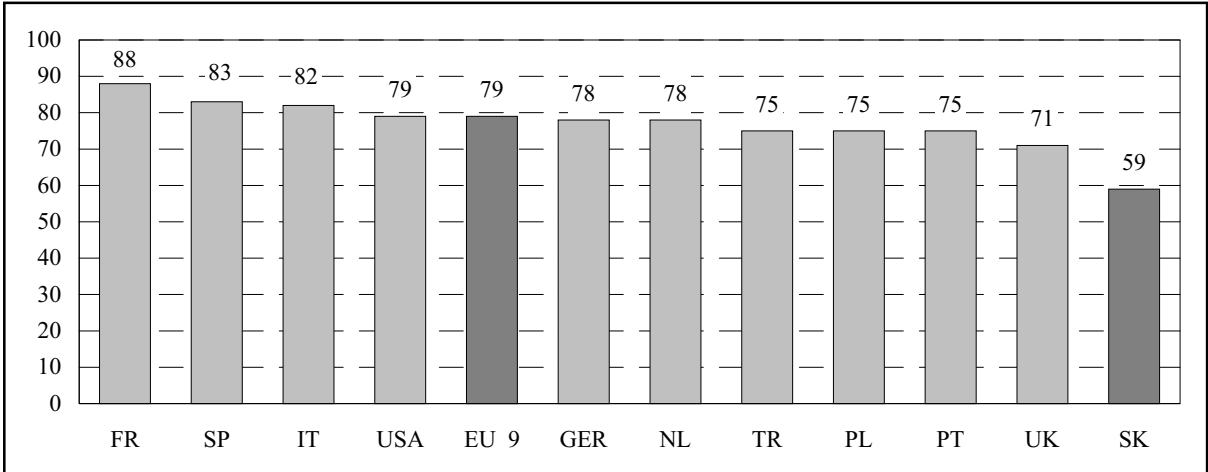
Therefore, one’s expectations should be adjusted to this reality. Compared to inhabitants of other countries, Slovak respondents more frequently answered “I don’t know” or “I don’t have an opinion”, which is a natural consequence of their inadequate awareness of issues examined by the survey. The survey exposed information deficits within the public opinion. But the deficits that can be found on the level of ordinary people merely reflect the deficits on the level of the local elite. It is important that the gradual opening of the country’s elite to the outside world is subsequently transferred into its social conscience. Like in the process of establishing democratic principles and market economy, the country’s elite is bound to play a pivotal role in the process of preparing Slovakia to new challenges stemming from its new position in the international context. One can already see certain progress in the Slovaks’ understanding of market economy and democracy principles; similarly, their understanding of international relations and context is likely to take some time.

# IV. WHAT KIND OF SLOVAKIA ON THE INTERNATIONAL CHESSBOARD?

What role do the Slovaks desire for their country to play in international relations in the future? According to the survey, almost three in five respondents (59%) believe it is better for Slovakia’s future if it actively participates in world developments. One in four respondents argued that Slovakia should keep itself aloof from international affairs and take a rather isolated or at least “non-interventionist” approach, in line with a popular saying “let sleeping dogs lie”. Naturally, the share of pro-active citizens in each particular country is also determined by its

size, its foreign policy “weight” and ensuing ambitions on the “international chessboard”. The share of pro-active citizens in Slovakia is lower than in large European countries; their country’s active role in international affairs was desired by 59% of Slovaks compared to 88% of French, 83% of Spaniards and 75% of Poles. Nevertheless, an important message for Slovakia’s political representation is that a majority of Slovak citizens do not wish to see Slovakia standing aside and pursuing an ostrich-like foreign policy.

**Graph 1**  
**Do you think it will be best for the future of your country if we take an active part in world affairs or if we stay out of world affairs? (% “take active part”)**



**Legend:** EU 9 = results for nine European countries (see “Information on the survey”); FR = France; GER = Germany; UK = The United Kingdom; IT = Italy; NL = The Netherlands; PL = Poland; PT = Portugal; SP= Spain; SK = Slovakia; TR = Turkey. These abbreviations are used in all graphs and tables in this text.



## V. TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIPS: THE UNITED STATES AND/OR EUROPE?

When examining their perception of existing or potential world superpowers, the Slovaks showed a certain “anti-superpower” reflex. When asked which country should be the world’s leading superpower, most Slovak respondents (57%) answered that “no country should be a superpower”. The occurrence of this answer was several times higher in Slovakia than in other European countries. For most respondents, it expressed their preference of international co-operation and complementary leadership to dominance of one country. For some members of the older generation, this opinion may reflect the “anti-Soviet resentment”, while for some younger people it may stem from the lack of political realism, a romantic idea of neutrality, etc. However, when asked which of the two natural superpowers – i.e. the European Union or the United States – should be the world’s leading superpower, more than one in three Slovaks (36%) preferred the former while only one in 33 (3%) favoured the latter.

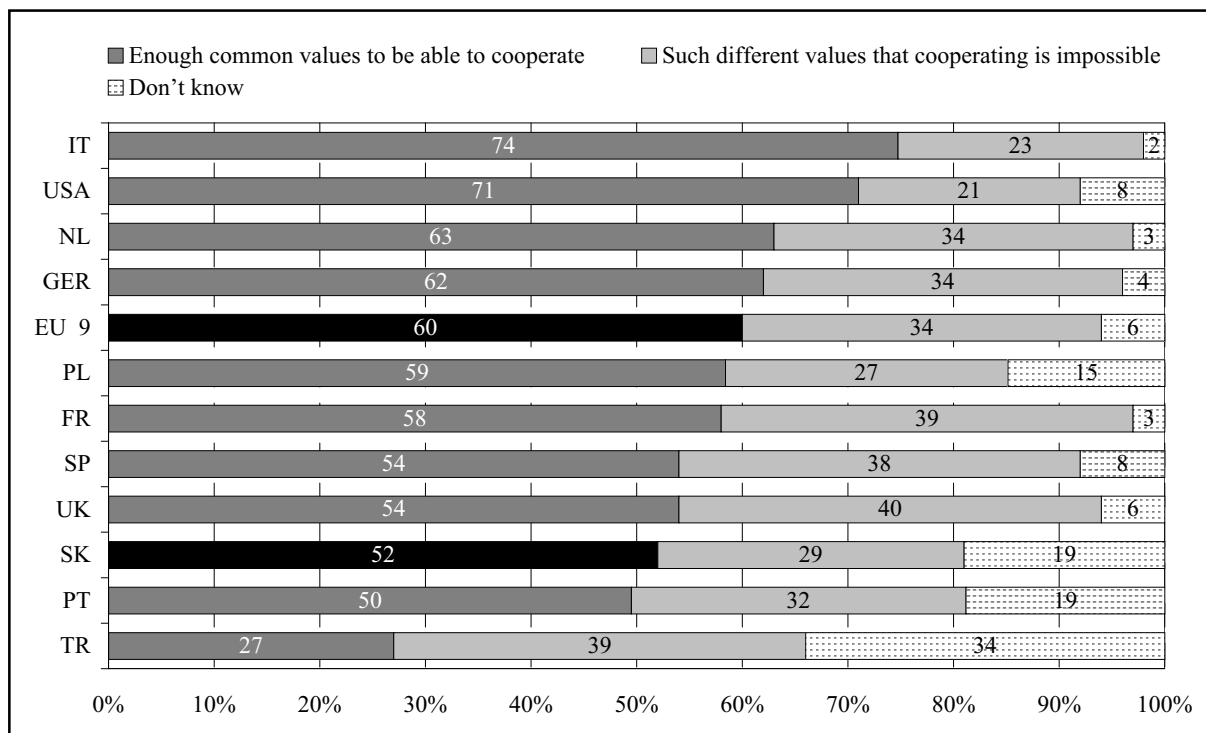
As far as the concept of transatlantic relationship is concerned, Slovakia seems to fit into the general European pattern. Most Slovaks believe that the United States

and the European Union share enough values to be able to co-operate in solving international problems; while 52% of Slovak respondents agreed with the assertion, 29% refused it (graph2).

However, when put in the sink or swim situation – i.e. when asked “in terms of Slovakia’s vital interests which are more important EU or US?” – an overwhelming majority of Slovaks preferred the European Union to the United States. Like other Europeans, the Slovaks also believe that the EU should become more independent from the USA in security and diplomatic issues. In this respect, 54% Slovaks matched the thin majority of Italians (59%), Dutch (56%) or French (55%). On the contrary, only 38% of Polish respondents supported greater independence of the EU. Two in three Slovaks believe that “Europe must acquire more military power to be able to protect its interests independently from the USA”, which also corresponds to the average share in EU-9.

Another question from the set of questions focusing on the future of transatlantic relations revealed certain vigilance or aloofness of the Slovaks, but also other

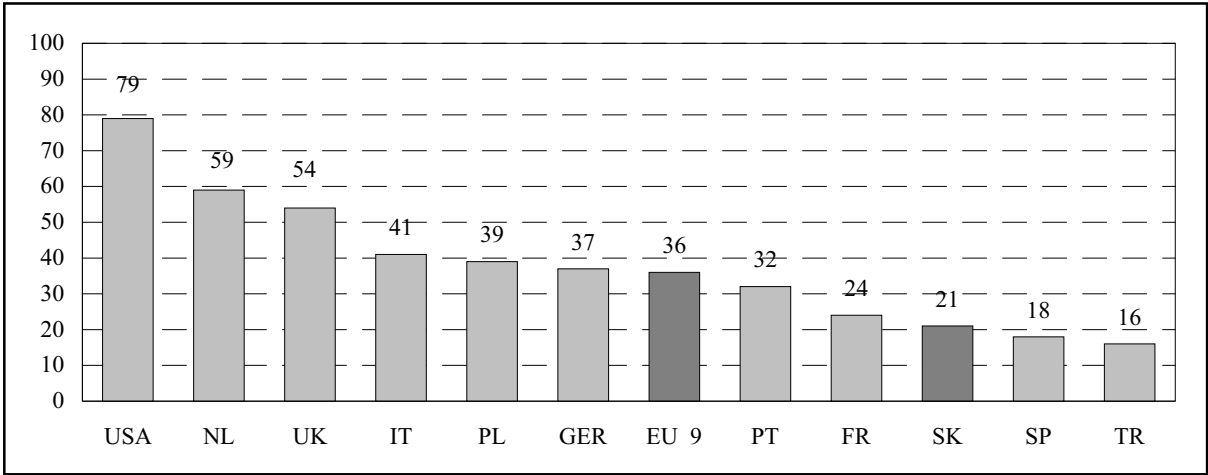
**Graph2**  
**EU and US cooperation on international problems**



Europeans, in respect to the current U.S. leadership. When asked “How desirable is it that the United States exert strong leadership in world affairs?” more than two in three Slovaks (68%) responded negatively while only one in five (21%) affirmatively. This attitude is largely in line with that of the French, Germans or Spaniards but in relative opposition to that of the Brit-

ish, Dutch and Poles. Generally speaking, the United States as a strong leader in international issues are not accepted in Europe anymore as the rate of acceptance declined further compared to 2003; while in 2002 the leadership role of the USA was endorsed by 64% of EU-7 respondents, in 2004 that level of support declined to 49%.

**Graph 3**  
**How desirable is it that the US exert strong leadership in world affairs? (% of „very+ somewhat desirable”)**



## VI. PERCEPTION OF INTERNATIONAL THREATS

Currently, people's perception of threats to global security is dramatically changing, with so-called asymmetric security threats like international terrorism or proliferation of weapons of mass destruction attracting more attention. Perception of these types of threats varies from country to country; the country's concrete experience plays an important role, although it is not the only factor. Like in 2003, both sides of the Atlantic agreed that international terrorism represents the greatest threat. The Slovaks also perceive international terrorism as the most serious of all security threats in the portfolio; however, their level of sensitivity to global security threats is somewhat lower than in other

European countries, not only in respect to international terrorism but also other types of threats (please, see Table 1).

Past surveys have indicated that the Slovaks are the most concerned about living standard and corruption, which corresponds to their long-term increased sensitivity to social problems. In respect to security, the Slovak public seems to care primarily about internal sources of threats. On the contrary, international or external threats or dangers that may come from beyond the country's border are viewed as less imminent. Although people have grown more sensitive to them over the past several years, they do not seem to realize the

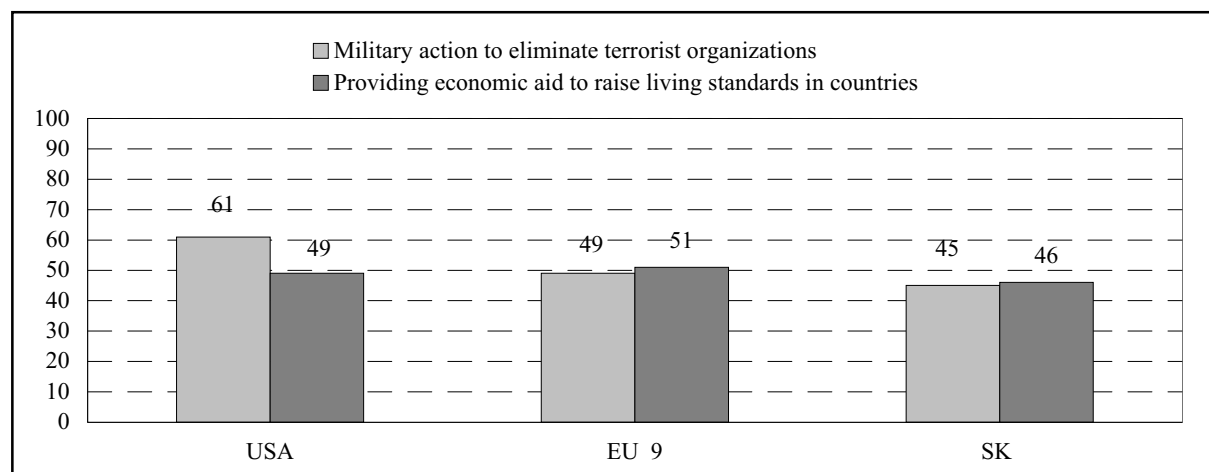
**Table 1**

**"I am going to read you a list of possible international threats to Europe in the next 10 years. Please tell me if you think each one on the list is an extremely important threat, an important threat, or not an important threat at all."** (% of "extremely important threat" answers)

	Slovakia	EU 9	USA
<b>International terrorism</b>	63	71	76
<b>A terrorist attack using weapons of mass destruction</b>	48	56	75
<b>The global spread of a disease, such as AIDS</b>	47	52	51
<b>Major economic downturn</b>	36	43	41
<b>Islamic fundamentalism</b>	31	52	51
<b>Large number of immigrants and refugees coming into Europe</b>	27	22	26
<b>Military conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors</b>	23	40	38

**Graph 4**

**Most appropriate way to fight terrorism** (% of „strongly + somewhat agree” with „military action to eliminate terrorist organizations” and „providing economic aid to raise living standards in countries where terrorists are recruited”)



link between internal and external security. From the viewpoint of external security, the Slovaks perceive their country as safe. It remains a question whether Slovak citizens subconsciously continue to perceive security threats primarily as conventional threats, for instance a military intervention.

A certain exception from this pattern of identifying possible threats is the Slovaks' perception of the inflow of immigrants. Here, their level of sensitivity is comparable to other European nations, which may suggest that this international problem has become reflected in people's perception of it as a possible internal security problem.

Generally speaking, international terrorism is clearly the most sensitively perceived global security threat; however, the Europeans and Americans have slightly different opinions on how to combat this threat. For instance, only 45% of Slovaks and 49% of Europeans considered a military action to be the most effective way of combating terrorism, while among the Americans this rate was 63%. On the other hand, "soft means" such as providing economic assistance to improve living conditions in countries that are the principal sources of terrorists were endorsed by 46% of Slovaks, 51% of Europeans and 49% of Americans. These are obviously the issues that unite both sides of the Atlantic.

## VII. USE OF MILITARY FORCE

Compared to Americans, the Europeans are generally more prepared to dispatch their armed forces to tackle post-intervention situations (i.e. peacekeeping or humanitarian missions). But people on both sides of the Atlantic seem to be in accord over endorsing preventive employment of armed forces in case of an imminent terrorism assault; such an intervention would be endorsed by 83% of Europeans and 92% of Americans. Sending off peacekeeping troops following a civil war was supported by 80% of Europeans and 66% of Americans, while employment of troops to stop the fighting in a civil war was supported by 56% Europeans and 38% of Americans.

In Slovakia, people's preparedness to endorse employment of armed forces in order to tackle various scenarios of security threats is generally lower. In this respect, Slovakia does not fit into the bigger European picture. More than five in six Slovaks (84%) would support military backup of humanitarian missions aimed at helping war victims; however, only five in 12 Slovaks (43%) would endorse sending off troops in order to prevent an imminent terrorism assault.

The survey presented respondents with various hypothetical scenarios involving the issues of using military force to tackle security threats as well as these interventions' legitimacy. Provided there is an international consensus over a military intervention to prevent an imminent terrorism assault, a majority of Slovak citizens would endorse it, although that majority would be thinner compared to the EU-9 average or the USA.

Slovak respondents' ideas about the issue of using military force show a lack of explainable or consistent pattern. On the one hand, "preventing an imminent terrorism attack" would constitute a good cause for 43% of respondents; on the other hand, "providing food and medical assistance to war victims" but also "to stop fighting in a civil war" would be considered a good cause by over 80% of them. Therefore, a conclusion may be drawn that the general Slovak public keeps significantly blurry and inconsistent notions when it comes to endorsing the use of military force.

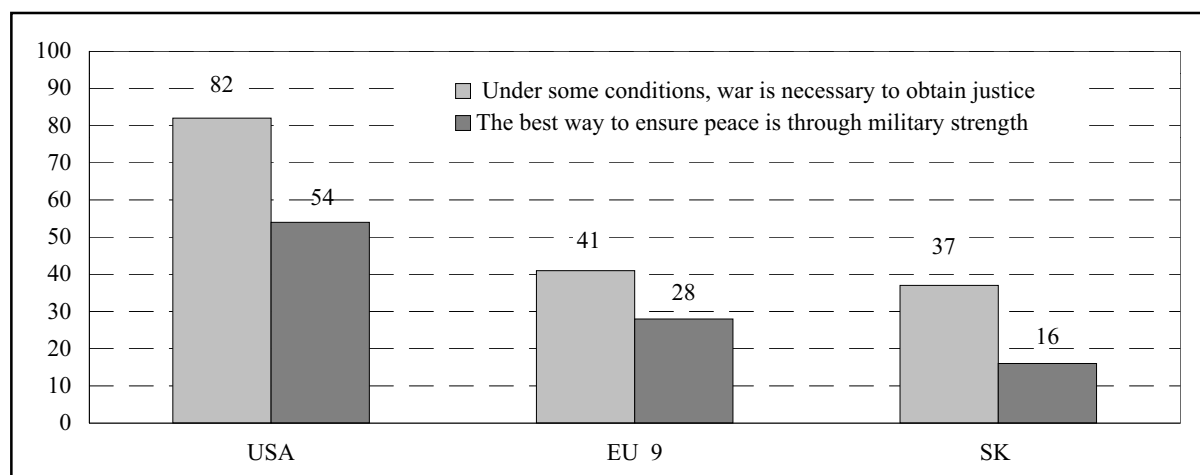
After all, this corresponds to the general lack of relevant issues in the country's public debate as well as its historical and political experience. In the past, Slovakia did not have to face many such decisions. Also, it is impossible to trace, with a satisfactory degree of certainty, the reasons for respondents' negative answers, i.e.

**Table 2**  
**"If there was UN/main European allies/NATO approval, would you be willing to use the country's armed forces to intervene in a foreign country in order to eliminate the threat of a terrorist attack?"**  
(% of "yes" answers)

	Slovakia	EU 9	USA
United Nations	61	70	78
Main European allies	58	67	86
NATO	50	65	79

**Graph 5**

Use of force (% of „strongly + somewhat agree”)



whether they were inspired by the lack of trust in effectiveness of used military force, principal disagreement or intuitive opposition to force solutions.

Respondents' answers to another set of questions examining their opinions on legitimacy of using military force and just causes for war confirm that the Slovaks are generally more reluctant to endorse the use of power

than inhabitants of other European countries. If people were divided into two principal types – so-called “hawks” and “doves” – then the Slovaks would certainly be closer to the “dove” type (please, see Graph 5). As other findings indicate, though, their “dovelike nature” tends to give way to a clear international consensus over using military force.

## VIII. STRONG ETHOS OF ALLIANCE

Three in four Slovaks believe that “when our country acts on a national security issue, it is critical that we do so together with our closest allies”. The ethos of alliance is strong among the Slovaks and their support of allies and the principle of multilateralism is high on the general level. An international institution that has traditionally high credibility in Slovakia is the United Nations (UN). According to the survey, two in three respondents think positively of the UN, which is very similar to the institution's perception in Poland.

The UN mandate – like that of main European allies – increases the legitimacy of possible military operations in the eyes of the public. The context of these findings was somewhat disturbed by the fact that 55% of respondents agreed (completely or partly) with the following statement: “When vital interests of our country are involved, it is justified to bypass the UN.” In other Euro-

pean countries, the rate of respondents' approval was lower.

While testing various scenarios of security threats and legitimacy of military interventions, the survey revealed

**Table 3**

**“If a situation like Iraq arose in the future, do you think it is essential to secure the approval of the UN/main European allies/NATO before using military force, or don't you think it is essential?”** (% of “it would be essential” answers)

	Slovakia	EU 9	USA
United Nations	78	82	58
Main European allies	78	80	66
NATO	59	72	58

that the public support for keeping the Slovak military contingent in Iraq would be significantly greater if the UN issued a mandate for multinational forces to oversee the project of Iraq's reconstruction (42%). As soon as that mandate is connected to U.S. military command,

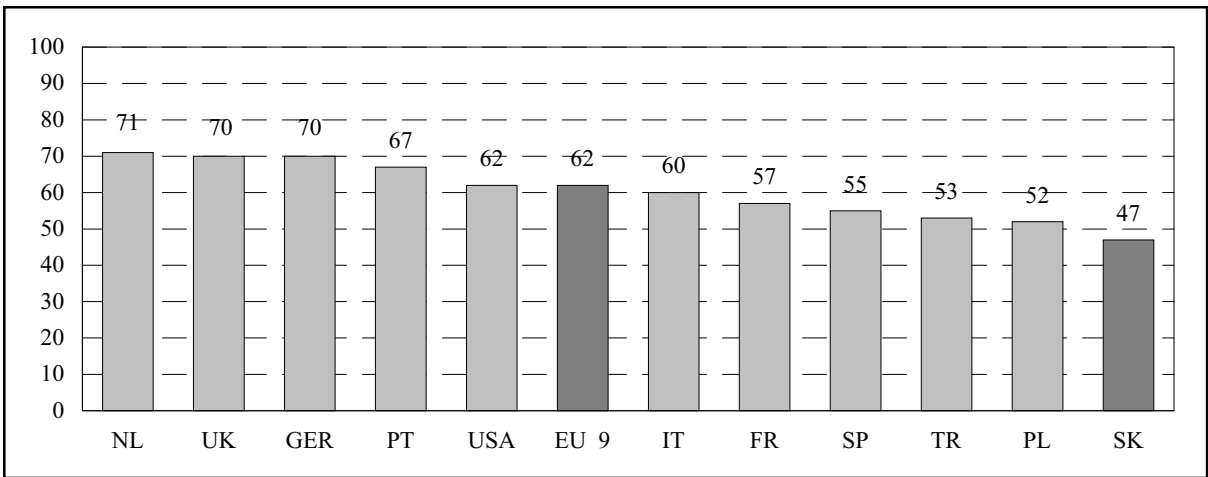
the rate of public support drops to 24%. Hypothetically, if a situation similar to the Iraqi conflict occurs again, a mandate from international institutions will be important to the Slovaks.

## IX. SLOVAKIA AS A NEW MEMBER OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC ALLIANCE

In spring 2004, Slovakia formally became a full-fledged member of NATO. Public opinion polls conducted before the accession indicated that the key argument in favor of the country's NATO membership was greater security but also political stability, economic prosperity and strengthening Slovakia's international position. According to the survey *Transatlantic Trends 2004*, almost half of Slovak citizens (47%) considers the Alliance important for Slovakia's security; more than one third (37%) disagreed, while almost one in six respondents (16%) did not have an opinion. In European countries that have been members of NATO for a long time, the share of people who view NATO as an important part of their security is significantly higher; for instance in Germany, the Netherlands and Great Britain, it hovers at 70%. But in Poland, which became a full-fledged member in 1999, the public support of NATO is 52%, a figure comparable with that of Slovakia.

The mentioned public opinion polls also examined citizens' perception of obligations stemming from their country's NATO membership. Toward the end of 2002, most respondents agreed with participation of Slovak troops in peacekeeping missions abroad; the ratio of people's acceptance/disapproval of the obligation to send Slovak troops to defend another NATO member state was 47% to 49%. The survey *Transatlantic Trends 2004* established that this ratio has not changed much, as only one in two respondents accepted the obligation. This finding indicates that a significant share of the Slovaks still have not identified themselves with Slovakia's NATO membership. This inevitably leads to a question whether the Slovak public is prepared for the fact that as a NATO member, Slovakia will not be only a passive consumer of security but also an active provider and guarantor of its allies' security. The experience of e. g. the Czech Republic is that the share of people identified with their country's NATO membership has increased since the country's accession.

**Graph 6**  
Is NATO essential to our country's security or not? (% of positive responses)



## X. IRAQ

Reactions of the Slovaks on the war in Iraq were similar to those of other European nations – at the turn of March and April 2003, three in four Slovak citizens (74%) viewed the military intervention against Iraq as wrong. More than year and a half after the intervention and 14 months since the main military campaign ended, this structure of public opinion has not changed much. According to the *Transatlantic Trends 2004* survey conducted at the beginning of June 2004, only one in five Slovak citizens (21%) endorsed the presence of the Slovak contingent in Iraq while seven in ten citizens (71%) disapproved it. The government's decision to send off troops is backed by a small but relatively solid core. The survey did not record any significant change in the support, although it was conducted shortly after three Slovak soldiers died in Iraq.

Based on the public opinion, the six European countries that dispatched troops to Iraq can be divided in two groups. In Slovakia (21%), Poland (24%) and Portugal (28%), the executive decision to send off troops to Iraq enjoys a minority support, while in Great Britain, Italy and the Netherlands the camps of the decision's advocates and opponents are relatively even.

In Germany and France, people emphatically back their political leaders' decision not to dispatch any troops to Iraq, with approximately 90% of the public supporting it. A special case is Spain, which withdrew its contingent following a terrorism assault in Madrid and inauguration of the new administration. This decision is supported by three in four Spanish citizens.

Like in other European countries, there is growing skepticism in Slovakia regarding the effect of the Iraqi war on the international campaign against terrorism. On the contrary, most people in Europe tend to believe that the military intervention has aggravated the threat of terrorism assaults (74% in Slovakia, 73% in the EU-9). This opinion certainly has to do with the lingering security crisis in Iraq.

The increasing criticism aimed at the war in Iraq is also reflected in doubts over whether the intervention's outcome was worth the sacrificed lives and other costs spent during the intervention. In June 2004, only 15% of Europeans (16% in Slovakia) believed it was worth it while in 2003 their share was 25%. The European skepticism is shared by more and more Americans whose support of the intervention declined from 55% in 2003 to 44% a year later.

## XI. FOREIGN POLICY PURSUED BY THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION AND RELATIONS TO THE UNITED STATES

Many people seem to personalize European criticism of the United States and their foreign policy with President George W. Bush. But is it fair to interchange the current wave of anti-Americanism with anti-Bushism?

Earlier surveys conducted in Slovakia seem to corroborate it. Most Slovaks perceive the United States positively (although Europe is perceived much more favourably); at the same time, most Slovaks are critical of foreign policy pursued by the Bush administration. There is a relevant group of those Slovaks who criticize the United States' current foreign policy and

simultaneously have a positive relation toward the country. A similar pattern is obvious from the results of *Transatlantic Trends 2004*: almost three in four Slovak citizens (72%) do not agree with how the President of the United States treats international politics, while less than one in four (22%) Slovaks agree. This ratio of opinions put Slovakia almost right in the middle of the 10 examined European countries (76% to 21%); however, one should realize the profound differences between particular European countries. On one pole is France where 86% of people criticize Bush; on the

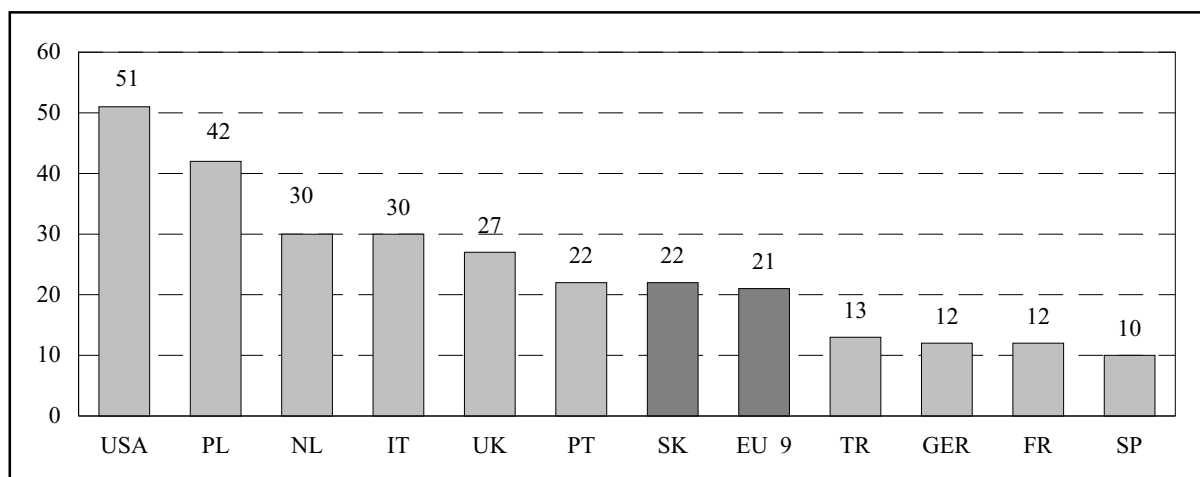
other pole is Poland where, despite the recent drop in the public support for Bush's international policies, the camps of his critics and opponents are the most balanced of all examined countries (51% of critics to 42% of supporters).

When examining the Slovaks' feelings toward particular countries or groups of countries on a scale of 100 (the so-called feeling thermometer where 100 means very warm, pleasant and positive feelings while zero expresses very cold, unpleasant and negative feelings), one will find out that the United States are placed right in the middle, that is, behind Germany, France and the European Union but before Israel, Turkey, China and other countries.

Earlier surveys suggest that most Slovaks do not perceive the United States negatively but rather as a clean slate, a country that has no relation to their nation's history. For example, in a survey conducted in 2002 a half of respondents could not name a single historic event or moment at which the history of the two nations would collide in good or in bad. The Slovaks' collective memory does not seem to include American aviators from World War II, the Marshall Plan, the role of the United States in defeating communism or the subsequent American assistance in the process of restoring democracy in Slovakia. This problem does not apply only to this specific part of historical memory but seems to have a more general applicability.

### Graph 7

**Do you approve or disapprove of the way the President of the United States George W. Bush is handling international policies?** (% of „very much + somewhat approve)



## XII. TURKEY

Like Slovakia, Turkey was incorporated into the *Transatlantic Trends* survey in 2004. The results indicated several areas where Turkey differs from the public opinion mainstream of EU member states and revealed that its inhabitants have a very reserved attitude toward the United States and transatlantic alliance. Also, Turkey portrayed itself as a country with above-average public

support for using military force and bypassing international institutions.

When examining the issue of Turkey's possible EU membership, the survey revealed significant ambivalence of attitudes in all nine EU member states. This applies particularly to countries that are newcomers to the EU. For instance, 31% of Slovak and 21% of Polish



respondents answered “I don’t know” when asked about Turkey’s possible EU membership; further 38% and 37%, respectively, did not view the issue either positively or negatively, saying it would be “neither good nor bad”. This part of the survey showed that an

important dimension of Slovakia’s recently acquired international status will be forming the public opinion in respect to a whole variety of new issues, such as the controversial issue of Turkey’s full-fledged EU membership.

### XIII. DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES WITHIN SLOVAK SOCIETY

The survey identified a number of differences and similarities between both sides of the Atlantic but also within Europe and America themselves. A variety of opinions regarding foreign policy and security issues was documented also within Slovak society. Education seems to be a strong differentiation factor, while age did not produce as glaring differences. Over several issues, respondents were primarily divided along ideological lines and party affiliations. This applies particularly to their attitudes to U.S. policies, the war in Iraq or Slovakia’s NATO membership. For instance, the presence of the Slovak contingent in Iraq is approved by 35% of ruling coalition parties’ supporters but only 14% of parliamen-

tary opposition parties’ sympathizers. The public opinion is similarly polarized over foreign policy pursued by the U.S. President George W. Bush. Also, supporters of governing parties more frequently tend to advocate Slovakia’s active role in world developments and perceive the North Atlantic Alliance as the cornerstone of the country’s security. Generally speaking, the survey corroborated the division lines previously identified by other surveys examining people’s attitudes to Slovakia’s integration. On the contrary, the “opinion gap” seems to be much narrower when it comes to people’s perception of global security threats, use of military force, the role of superpowers or U.S. vs. EU leadership.

### XIV. CONCLUSION

For quite some time before its actual accession to the North Atlantic Alliance, Slovakia acted as a *de facto* ally, for instance by dispatching its military contingent as part of multinational forces in Iraq. The survey *Transatlantic Trends 2004* documents the public opinion in Slovakia in year one so to speak, i.e. the year when it became a full-fledged member of NATO and the EU. The process of getting used to its new role and new responsibility will be

gradual and lengthy. The survey enables us to compare the Slovak society with key players of world politics from the angle of public opinion and, in the future, measure the path the country has covered. However, the principal objective of participating in the survey was not only to analyze opinions of the Slovak public but also to encourage the public debate on important foreign policy issues, such as global security and Slovakia’s contribution to it.

**Slovakia in the transatlantic context**

Findings of the survey *Transatlantic Trends 2004* with a special focus on Slovakia

Prepared by: Oľga Gyárfášová

Translated by: Daniel Borský

Typesetting: Kalligram Computing Ltd., Bratislava

© Institute for Public Affairs, Bratislava 2004